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TWO ROMANESQUE SCULPTURES IN FRANCE  
BY ITALIAN MASTERS

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WHILE discussing in a recent number of the JOURNAL<sup>1</sup> the early jamb sculptures of France, I was obliged to exclude from consideration those of Bourg-Argental (Loire) and in the museum of Le Puy, as they were known to me only from publications not sufficiently detailed to make an analysis of style possible. I have now, however, been able to visit the monuments on the spot, and as they throw no little light not only upon the question of jamb sculptures, but also upon broader aspects of Romanesque art, it seems well to add a note of supplement to my former paper.

The most striking fact that came to my observation at Bourg-Argental (Figs. 1, 2) was that the sculptures are the work of an artist whom I already knew well. This portal is obviously by the same hand that carved the capitals of the cloister of S. Orso (Figs. 3, 9) at Aosta in the years immediately following 1133.<sup>2</sup>

The sculptor of the S. Orso cloister is known to us as a follower of another anonymous artist who carved the pulpit at Isola S. Giulio (Fig. 4) *ca.* 1120. Besides the capitals at Aosta (Figs. 3, 9), there may be attributed to him three other capitals coming from the same cloister and now in a museum of Turin, and a statuette in the Metropolitan Museum of New York.<sup>3</sup> I had already deduced from the style of the latter that our master had been in France,<sup>4</sup> although I confess that this did not lessen my surprise at stumbling upon one of his works in the heart of the Cevennes.

That the Bourg-Argental sculptures (Figs. 1, 2) are really by the same master, not merely of the same atelier, does not seem to me open to doubt. The columns decorated with spiral rinceaux are a motive characteristic of the school, and which our artist appears to have taken over from his master at Isola S. Giulio (Fig. 4). These columns, the use of flinty marble, the strong classical feel-

<sup>1</sup> Vol. XXII, 1918, pp. 418 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Porter, *Lombard Architecture*, I, p. 290; II, pp. 57, 60 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced *A. J. A.* XXII, 1918, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 426.



FIGURE 1.—MASTER OF THE SANT' ORSO CLOISTERS: PORTAL AT BOURG-ARGENTAL.

ing, an adamantine hardness of attack are the most striking analogies which connect our portal with the Aosta cloisters. A closer examination reveals the same resemblance in details of execution. The convention used to indicate the eyes—unique I

think in mediaeval sculpture—the draperies, the peculiar broad noses, the treatment of the hair are all identical in the two works. The capitals at Bourg-Argental are indistinguishable in style from those of Aosta. There are the same angular metallic figures in the same contorted poses. The identity of workmanship is made all the easier to recognize by the strong individuality of our artist, which is sharply differentiated from that of all other sculptors of the period.

The sculptures at Bourg-Argental necessitate a revision in some details of the impression of this artistic personality gained solely on the basis of works previously known. At Aosta (Figs. 3, 9) I was able to detect but little trace of the influence of Nicolò and only distant echoes of that of earlier Lombard sculptors such as Guglielmo da Modena. Our artist seemed to derive his inspiration rather from the school of Pavia, and even here indirectly, by way of the Isola S. Giulio pulpit (Fig. 4). This pulpit itself seemed to me not purely Italian, but to show the influence of southern France in the classicism of its ornament.<sup>1</sup>

The Metropolitan statuette showed two distinct influences which if found on the Aosta cloisters were so disguised as to be hardly recognizable. The first was the French feeling already referred to; the second was the evident imitation of Nicolò. In view of this I did not dare attribute the Metropolitan statuette to the hand of the Aosta sculptor, while recognizing that it was obviously of the same atelier.<sup>2</sup>

Now the sculptures at Bourg-Argental (Figs. 1, 2) make it clear that the Metropolitan figure is really by the Aosta artist, for they show that he underwent exactly these two influences. The very fact that he worked in France would be sufficient to justify the inference that he must have picked up some acquaintance with the French manner. We should, indeed, expect him to show precisely such traces of French influence as are exhibited by the New York figure. More than this the Bourg-Argental portal (Fig. 2) makes it clear that he adopted several purely French motives. The lunette with the Deity in an aureole surrounded by the evangelists and angels is certainly a weak imitation of Burgundian models. The type of face on the

<sup>1</sup> Porter, *Lombard Architecture*, I, p. 257. The St. Matthew is in certain respects strikingly similar to the St. Matthew in the upper part of the façade of the cathedral at Modena.

<sup>2</sup> See *A. J. A.* XXII, 1918, p. 426.

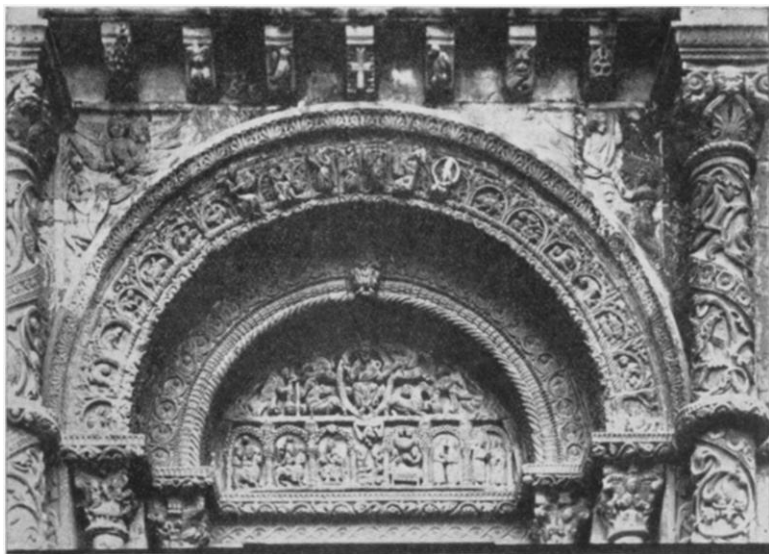


FIGURE 2.—MASTER OF THE SANT' ORSO CLOISTERS: TYMPANUM OF THE PORTAL, BOURG-ARGENTAL.



FIGURE 3.—MASTER OF THE SANT' ORSO CLOISTERS: CAPITAL OF THE CLOISTER OF SANT' ORSO, AOSTA.

other hand is closely analogous to that of the local school of Le Puy.

What is even more patent in the sculptures of Bourg-Argental, and rather surprisingly, is the influence of Nicolò. This appears not only in the smallish figures addossed to the colonnettes, which like the similar motive in the Metropolitan statuette could only have been derived from that master's work at Ferrara (Fig. 5) or Verona (Fig. 6). It, indeed, permeates the entire doorway. The rinceau and guilloche beneath the lintel are identical in spirit with those of the Ferrara portal. The lower register of the lintel is divided into scenes separated by an arcade. This motive was used by Nicolò at Piacenza (Fig. 7), and later repeated at Ferrara (Fig. 8). The pattern on certain of the colonnettes of this arcade at Bourg-Argental (Fig. 2) and Ferrara (Fig. 8) is the same. Inscriptions are placed on the horizontal bands dividing the registers at Bourg-Argental and at Piacenza (Fig. 7). The horse of the magi at Bourg-Argental (Fig. 2) repeats line for line the horse of the *Flight* in the Piacenza archivolt (Fig. 7), except in the head where quite evidently the inferior sculptor found himself unable to copy his model.<sup>1</sup> Even more striking, the *Annunciation* (Fig. 2) repeats almost exactly that of Ferrara (Fig. 8).

These observations are of some aid in determining the date of the Bourg-Argental portal. The style seems broader and more experienced than that of the Aosta cloisters. Bourg-Argental must, therefore, be later than 1133. It must, indeed, be later than 1135, since it shows copying of the Ferrara sculptures, executed in that year. I conjecture that it probably was carved between 1135 and 1140. That it was not later may be inferred from the fact that our sculptor betrays no acquaintance with the works of Nicolò at S. Zeno and the cathedral of Verona. S. Zeno was given its portal in 1138, while that of the cathedral dates from the following year.

The Bourg-Argental sculptures are extremely instructive in showing us exactly how artistic ideas were transmitted from one country to another in mediaeval Europe. We see in them our artist carrying the art of Nicolò half across the continent, from Ferrara to the Cevennes. We are somewhat less amazed than

<sup>1</sup> Our artist was more successful in a capital of the S. Orso cloisters (Fig. 9). But the superb horse of Nicolò's St. George at Ferrara was beyond even his ambition (Fig. 8).



FIGURE 4.—PULPIT AT ISOLA SAN GIULIO, LAGO D'ORTA.

before at the close analogies which exist between the sculptures of the school of Poitou and those of northern Italy.

It is even possible to follow the infiltration of Nicolò-esque influences one step further. The jamb figures in the museum of

Le Puy (Fig. 10) are evidently derived from Bourg-Argental. This is clear from the draperies, the scrolls, the gestures with which the scrolls are held, the socles, and the capitals. The "Karitas" on the capital of the foremost colonnette of the Le Puy museum (Fig. 10), indeed, is copied exactly from the precisely similar figure on the outer right-hand capital at Bourg-Argental (Fig. 1). The derivation of the Le Puy sculptures is, therefore, not open to doubt.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Nicolò's jamb sculptures had found their way half the distance from Ferrara to Paris within, it seems, five years of the time that they had been created in Italy shows how quickly artistic ideas were transmitted and passed from one country to another at this period. The exact knowledge thus gained also makes a closer examination of the entire subject of jamb sculptures necessary.

One's thought naturally turns to the holy-water font at Chamalières (Haute-Loire), since geographically

<sup>1</sup> Something in the faces of these figures suggests acquaintance with St.-Etienne of Beauvais. Were they blown upon by winds from the north as well as from the south?



FIGURE 5.—SCULPTURE ON JAMB,  
FERRARA: NICOLÒ.



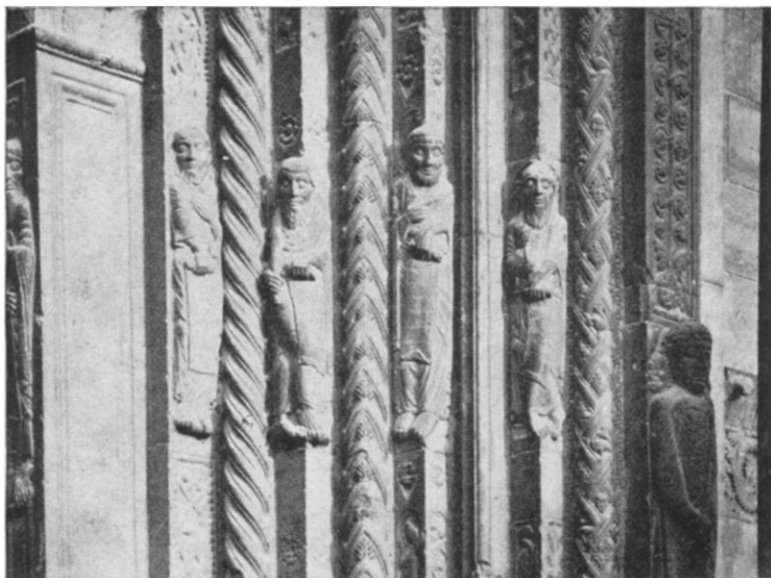


FIGURE 6.—JAMB OF THE CATHEDRAL, VERONA: NICOLÒ.

this is situated in the same region with the monument we have just been studying. I formerly supposed that this basin (Fig.11), notwithstanding its obviously Nicolò-esque character, was later than 1140, being misled by the style of one of the heads, as seen in photographs. This head, however, I find upon study of the monument itself, is no part of the original sculpture, but brought from elsewhere and arbitrarily added by modern restorers. I am now very far from sure that the Chamalières basin is later than 1140.

A close study of the style of this basin has, indeed, convinced me that like the Bourg-Argental portal, it too is by the hand of a



FIGURE 7.—LINTEL OF THE CATHEDRAL, PIACENZA: NICOLÒ.



FIGURE 8.—LINTEL OF THE CATHEDRAL, FERRARA: NICOLÒ.

Lombard sculptor. This hand, in fact, is none other than that of Nicolò himself.

Not only is the Chamalières basin by Nicolò, but it dates from his Ferrarese period. The style is far more suave and developed than in his earlier productions at Piacenza (Fig. 7). On the other hand it is less mannered than the jamb sculptures of Verona (Fig. 6). When, however, the Chamalières basin is compared with the jamb sculptures of



FIGURE 9.—MASTER OF THE SANT' ORSO CLOISTERS: CAPITAL OF THE CLOISTER OF SANT' ORSO, AOSTA.



FIGURE 10.—FOLLOWER OF  
THE MASTER OF THE SANT'  
ORSO CLOISTERS: SCULP-  
TURES OF THE HOTEL DIEU:  
MUSEUM, LE PUY.

Ferrara (Fig. 5), it is evident that we have in the two works the closest analogies. There are the same draperies, the same hands, the same eyes, the same beards, the same noses, the same lips, the same scrolls, the same niches, the same hair. Indeed, the basin at Chamalières resembles the jambs of Ferrara much more closely than do Nicolò's signed works at Sagra S. Michele and Verona. It seems, therefore, impossible to doubt that it is by his hand.

The question arises how this work found its way into the heart of the Cevennes. Did Nicolò, like his pupil, the master of the S. Orso cloisters, undertake a journey into the Velay? There is plenty of evidence in his works to show that he did travel in France, although rather in the south-west, in Languedoc and Aquitaine. It seems to me, however, more probable that this basin was exported from Italy, and carried to Chamalières. It will doubtless be objected that the basin is an exceedingly weighty object to have been transported in this manner. Yet we know that far more complicated shipments were made in the twelfth century. The great ambulatory columns of Cluny, for example, the transportation of which would be something of a problem at

the present day, and in comparison with which the Chamalières basin seems a mere trifle, were brought all the way from Rome to Burgundy. The transportation of the Chamalières basin would have been all the easier, because it could have been sent most of the way by water, across the sea and up the Rhone.

If we assume that the basin was thus imported, we can explain two facts that otherwise would be puzzling. The first is that

Nicolò never betrays in his work acquaintance with the local style of the Velay; and the second that his hand and even his influence, at least so far as I can see, are absent from the other sculptures of Chamalières. Had the great Nicolò "so famous among sculptors" actually been there, it is difficult to believe that advantage would not have been taken of his presence to procure other works. If, however, we suppose that the basin was imported, all is explained.

I am even tempted to imagine that the journey of the master of the S. Orso cloisters to Ferrara may not have been unconnected with the purchase of the basin. There is at least no doubt that that artist saw Nicolò's work at Ferrara, and that the basin was made by Nicolò at precisely this time. I offer this suggestion of course as a mere conjecture. The certain thing is that the basin of Chamalières was executed by Nicolò and about the year 1135.



FIGURE 11.—HOLY-WATER BASIN, CHAMALIÈRES: NICOLÒ.

The history of the motive of jamb sculptures begins in the light of these facts to seem somewhat less obscure. We see the idea, initiated by Guglielmo at Cremona before 1117,<sup>1</sup> taken up and developed by his pupil Nicolò in 1135 at Ferrara (Fig. 5). We see the motive in Nicolò's version spreading immediately into France. The basin at Chamalières (Fig. 11) is by Nicolò's own hand. The jamb figures of Bourg-Argental (Fig. 1) are by a follower. Those of Le Puy (Fig. 10) are derived from Bourg-Argental. The similar figures of St.-Etienne of Toulouse<sup>2</sup> are for me without doubt also inspired by the art of Nicolò.

<sup>1</sup> The jamb sculptures at Cremona have been frequently illustrated, *e.g.*, *A.J.A.* XXII, 1918, p. 416.

<sup>2</sup> Illustrated, *e.g.*, *A.J.A.* XXII, 1918, p. 418.

The question remains where and how did the builders of St.-Denis<sup>1</sup> become acquainted with the motive. This I shall immediately confess I am unable to answer.

I shall only observe, in the hope of throwing some one else on the track of a solution, that St.-Denis is a compound of inspirations derived from many quarters. Suger appears to have gathered ideas from the four corners of the world. In his work we find combined with the building forms indigenous to the Ile-



FIGURE 12.—CAPITAL IN THE CRYPT OF ST.-DENIS.

de-France, sexpartite vaults of Normandy, sculpture of Aquitaine, and voussures of Saintonge. M. Mâle would have us believe that even the humble work at Beaulieu contributed its quota, and it may be suspected that St.-Basile of Etampes was also drawn upon. Whence the stained glass came, no one knows, but it is hardly likely that Suger invented the art. The windows of St.-Denis are obviously not the first attempt of a novice, but the production of artists who were working in a medium with which they were well acquainted. Suger, moreover, expressly

<sup>1</sup> One of Montfaucon's engravings is reproduced, *A.J.A.* XXII, 1918, p. 400.

states that his glass-workers were imported. It is also sure that Suger was in touch with the building operations at Cluny. He writes of bringing marble columns from Rome by water in obvious



FIGURE 13.—JAMB OF ST.-DENIS.

imitation of what, as we have already mentioned, had actually been done at the Burgundian monastery.

It is not less certain that the architecture of St.-Denis was influenced by Lombardy, especially in its ornamental and decorative details. The mosaics were assuredly purely Italian. The caryatids of the western portal are a characteristically Guglielmo-esque motive, and have Guglielmo-like draperies (Fig. 13).

Nothing could be more completely Lombard than the lion with his tail between his legs supporting the colonnette. This colonnette itself<sup>1</sup> is decorated with spirals and ornaments in the manner we have observed to be peculiar to the masters of the Isola S. Giulio pulpit and the S. Orso cloister. The reliefs of the zodiac show striking analogies with the sculptures of the same subject at Modena. A capital of the crypt has on the abacus a completely Lombard anthemion (Fig. 12). The angels in the voussures, heavy and expressionless, are of Lombardic, rather than of

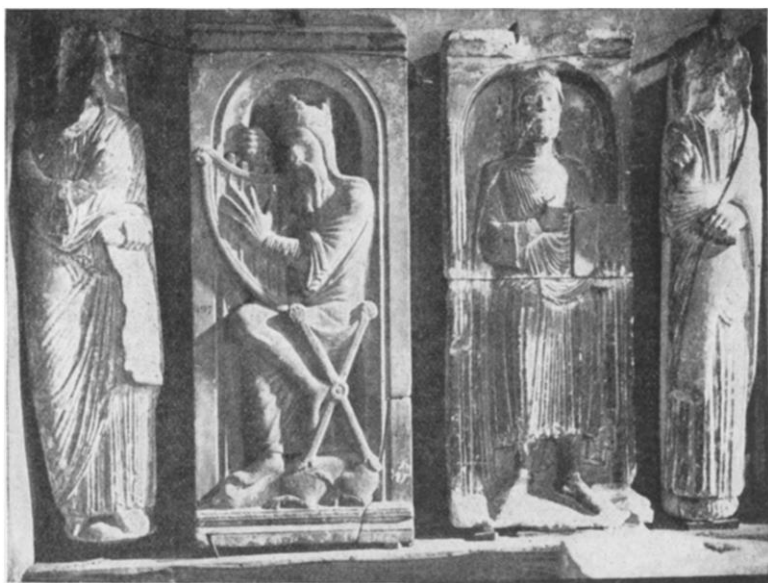


FIGURE 14.—SCULPTURES OF LA DAURADE: MUSEUM, TOULOUSE.

Aquitanian type. The figures of the virgins in arches surmounted by tabernacles recall Guglielmo's prophets at Modena. The peasant quality of the broad squat figures is also reminiscent of Guglielmo.

It seems certain, therefore, that the sculptors of St.-Denis were familiar with the work of Guglielmo at Modena. I cannot, however, detect evidence that they were acquainted either with Cremona or with the works of Nicolò. It should be borne in

<sup>1</sup> It is of course modern, but perhaps copied from an authentic ancient fragment.

mind in this connection that Modena is on the Via Emilia, and hence upon the route taken by French travellers, while Cremona and Ferrara would both be out of their way. It seems to me, therefore, possible, but not certain, that the builders of St.-Denis derived their jamb sculptures from Italy directly.

On the other hand it is admitted that the artists of St.-Denis copied freely the sculpture of Aquitaine. But the jamb sculptures of La Daurade at Toulouse (Fig. 14) seem to me very clearly to be derived from, rather than prototypes of, St.-Denis and Chartres: and it remains quite uncertain whether there exists in Aquitaine any example of jamb sculptures anterior to 1140. At all events, the facts that the portal of Bourg-Argental is by the master of the S. Orso cloister, and that the Chamalières basin is by Nicolò, will, I trust, furnish a secure starting-point for future investigations.

A. KINGSLEY PORTER.